

ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER
383

for his part, has nothing whatever to say against them from the moral standpoint; he deprecates them, even as he deprecates all marriages between relations, on physiological grounds. But the affections bow neither to legal enactments nor to scientific rules ; love, as we are all aware, has no master; and if, therefore, one accept the position of Dr. Pascal and his niece Clotilde, Zola's work will be found one of absorbing interest for the thinking mind. True, it is disfigured by an error which the reader must set aside: the death of the old drunkard Macquart by spontaneous combustion, for scientists have declared such a death to be impossible. Zola, however, long before writing "Le Docteur Pascal/" had found a case of the kind recorded in a scientific work; and for years, as several of his letters and utterances show, he had nursed the idea of bringing it into his final volume. Nobody then warned him of his error, but directly his book appeared several scientists protested that, whatever might be the effects of alcoholism, it could not lead to a death like Macquart's. That episode, then, must be dismissed, but the bulk of the book remains, with its terrible lessons, its pages of vivid and merciless analysis, its pictures of the evils of life relieved by a glowing faith in nature's power for good, an optimism which nothing dismays, which points to the dawn of a brighter day for

humanity, whatever may be its present condition. And from the purely literary standpoint " Le Docteur Pascal" is admirable. Its style is perfect. The descriptive and the analytical passages are replete with beauty, depth, and force of expression. Poetry is here so thoroughly welded with prose that one cannot object to it as one may in some other volumes, such, for instance, as " Une Page d'Amour," where